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AGENCY CLERICAL PERSONNEL

Recruitment, Training, Utilization, and Attrition

1. The purpose of this paper is to present certain conclusions which have been reached as a result of a review of the Agency's present situation with respect to obtaining, training, utilizing, and retaining clerical personnel. These conclusions are presented in the following paragraphs.

2. The only selective test which recruiters administer to candidates for clerical employment is one which was developed specifically for this purpose and which requires only 15 minutes. There is no other testing of personality, intelligence, or other factors until after the candidate enters on duty. The validity of this short test is high, and its cut-off score appears to be correctly established. If we were to raise the cut-off score, the Agency would be denied the services of quite suitable clerical personnel. If we were to lower the cut-off score, the Agency could recruit more clerical employees but would increase its attrition rate because of the subsequent performance of the low-scoring applicants. There appears to be no need to change the test or its cut-off score at this time.

3. With respect to such clerical skills as typing and stenographic abilities, the recruiters follow the Agency minimum standards. In the

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many cases where recruiters cannot arrange for the candidates to take proficiency tests of these skills, the recruiters accept the skill certifications (test scores) provided by schools. It is true that sometimes the certifications indicate a higher level of skill than the candidates later demonstrate on the Agency's proficiency tests. Such disparities on test scores usually are not great, and the Agency is readily able to impart the small increase which is necessary to meet our standards. For this reason it is not believed necessary to alter the procedure of accepting school certifications as a part of the recruitment process.

4. It is believed that other screening and selection judgments used by the clerical recruiters are realistic and responsive to the needs of the Agency at this time. They do not appear to be too restrictive and should not be lowered by the Agency just because the highly competitive market makes it difficult to recruit adequate numbers of persons.

5. The Inspector General's report on training describes some of the problems which make it difficult to recruit clerical personnel. These problems or difficulties should not lead to a lowering of Agency standards since persons who do not meet present standards would cause other problems. For example, selecting persons of lower

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stenographic or typing skills would obviously lead to the need to provide extensive fundamental training in these skills rather than providing essentially refresher training as is now done. Selecting persons with lower scores on the 15 minute screening test would, in many cases, lead to acquiring employees who could not learn, or would have difficulty with, various parts of their job duties. It is believed that none of our clerical problems would be truly solved by lowering our selection standards, particularly since it is reported that personnel recruited under these standards during the last two years have been described as very satisfactory by their supervisors in their first job assignments.

6. Instead of lowering its selection standards, the Agency should achieve the position of recruiting adequate numbers of clerical personnel who meet or exceed its present standards. Action to reach this position was taken after the Inspector General's report on training was completed; the clerical recruiting staff has been increased to permit recruitment of a greater number of persons to meet clerical needs.

7. After recruitment, new clerical personnel are placed in a holding or interim assignment "pool." They remain in this status while awaiting security clearance, medical examination, and other induction processing. During this period they receive orientation and "induction" training; the latter training keeps them productively occupied and increases their

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occupational skills and knowledge. Such training and experience as they receive while required to be in the pool increases their value to the Agency.

8. The induction training given to clerical personnel while in the interim pool normally is not extensive (ordinarily 40 hours of instruction, approximately). At least on paper, the clerical personnel have already met our minimum performance levels for typing and stenographic skill, and their induction training is considered to be "refresher" in nature. In addition, these skills frequently have deteriorated somewhat since their proficiency was last tested, and the induction training restores the loss.

9. As indicated earlier, a number of the new clerical personnel achieve lower scores on the Agency's proficiency tests than were reported on the school certificates accepted by the recruiters. This discrepancy may be explained in some cases by lack of recent use of their skills as is indicated above. In other cases, the lower scores may be attributed to differences in test scoring procedures, to certain practicing techniques used by some schools, to unfamiliar test surroundings, or to other circumstances which are beyond our control. The Agency's induction training, offered while new clerical personnel are in the interim assignment pool, increases the qualifications of this type of person to Agency standards, normally without extensive

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instruction. Thus the clerical training offered is refresher and remedial rather than fundamental, and hence is believed quite responsive to the present situation and not excessive.

10. Present practices for accomplishing the initial assignment of new clerical personnel are believed to be generally quite satisfactory with respect to deploying available skills to meet the requirements of jobs. The existing placement systems and placement personnel prevent any significant wasting of skills, and supervisors have indicated their satisfaction. There are occasions when, despite such long-range planning as is possible, job requirements cannot be met because new clerical personnel are simply not available from the pipeline and because overstrength situations are not permitted. This situation is under constant attention, however, and the recent increase in the clerical recruiting staff should help to ensure that new personnel are in the pipeline to meet expected and planned requirements.

11. The initial assignment of clerical personnel might be made somewhat more selectively if those involved in the placement process would make more use of the results of the test battery administered to new clerical personnel after they enter on duty. This improvement, however, would only be possible if there were a supply of clerical personnel which was completely adequate for all needs, and if sufficient time could be taken to consider the test scores of all prior to accomplishing allocations and more selective placements.

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12. After initial assignments of clerical personnel are accomplished, however, there is an increased possibility that some of the skills of some clerical employees may not be utilized productively at different times during their employment. Analysis of the situation indicates that this occasional waste of skills is largely in situations wherein a secretary is not required to use her shorthand skill. It is further believed that these situations occur primarily in the Clandestine Services although they do occur to some degree within DD/I and DD/S organizations. It is probable that the very nature of some jobs is such that the job incumbents are unable to dictate material to their secretaries. In other situations the job incumbents could dictate but do not. Officers and panels concerned with personnel placement, together with the job classification specialists, are giving fairly close attention to identifying secretarial positions not requiring shorthand capability, and to avoiding the waste of stenographic skills in such positions. With respect to another alternative of identifying the officers whose secretaries are stenographers but who do not give dictation to their secretaries by choice or by inability to dictate, there is a greater problem. Within the Clandestine Services, rotation of officers is a way of life. A secretary in a given office may work for a different officer every two years, and occasionally more frequently. It is administratively quite difficult to determine in every case if the

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officer assigned to a new position definitely will not give dictation to his secretary for a minimum amount of time each week, and to reassign the secretary if the officer were to admit that stenographic skill was not required in his office. Further, continuous Agency-wide surveys to verify that secretaries were using their stenographic skills during a certain percentage of their work time, and to cause the reassignment of those secretaries who currently did not, would present certain problems; much time would be required for the investigations, completely truthful answers could not be expected in every case, and a great deal of objection and resistance by Agency officers might be anticipated. This would be particularly true in the Clandestine Services where the rotation and reassignment of officers is so frequent that it is felt that situations involving such waste of stenographic skills will correct themselves in a matter of time.

13. Placement panels and personnel are well aware that some secretaries are in situations where their stenographic skill is not being used, and are making a continuous conscious effort to achieve improved distribution of stenographic skills. In this effort they are also indoctrinating supervisors at all levels with respect to the problem. It is believed that there will be no let-down in this effort until well qualified secretary-stenographers are readily available for the asking, and most supervisors know that such is not now the case.

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14. It is not believed that a significant portion of the Agency's attrition among clerical employees is due to waste of skills in low quality assignments. It is true that college graduates in clerical or semi-clerical positions have expressed dissatisfaction occasionally; such cases are remedied internally in nearly every instance. Further, very little of the attrition rate is attributable to the situations discussed in the preceding paragraphs in which secretaries do not use their stenographic skills; little dissatisfaction has been expressed by such personnel, and those who complain are given more suitable assignments in nearly every instance. The true causes of most of the attrition are beyond the Agency's control. There is no one way to meet salary competition, nor can living costs and conditions in the Washington area be controlled. Most importantly, the recruiters have not been able to accelerate their recruitment in a highly competitive market of those who would meet our standards (which should not be lowered), who would accept our not unusually attractive employment situation, but who would be less susceptible to marriage or, if married, child-bearing (the recruiters ^{out} are not sure how to screen for this latter qualification.)

15. In summary with respect to the clerical attrition rate, the loss of clerical personnel is high but should not be considered a cause for alarm. At present, the Agency's attrition rate for clerical personnel is less than that of the rest of Government despite working conditions

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and surroundings which frequently are not optimal. It is believed that the Agency's rate of loss actually is somewhat standard, predictable, and inevitable. We compensate for these expected losses by planning in advance and ensuring that adequate replacements are in the pipeline. In the meantime, personnel officers, career development groups, and supervisors are conscious that the attrition does take place, and are attempting to prevent losses to the degree to which they can do something about it.

16. When the Agency's clerical induction training program is weighed in the broader context of clerical recruitment, job assignment, utilization, and attrition, it would appear that the present training program is quite in harmony with and appropriate to the present personnel situation. This training program can be altered readily whenever there is a change in requirements or a change in the circumstances reviewed in this paper.

17. In conclusion, there are no specific recommendations for a more effective system of clerical usage and training at this time. This by no means implies that the present system is perfect; the Inspector General's report cited a number of continuing problems, and there are more. This paper presents no specific recommendations for the reason that clerical recruitment, training, utilization, and attrition are under constant study and have been so for years. The problems involved are before the eyes of many and cannot be ignored. The factors involved

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in the supply and demand situation could not permit the breeding of complacency or inattention on anyone's part. The overall look at this time ~~study~~ indicates that, in an atmosphere of constant change ~~study~~ *basically adequate* adjustment and experiment, the Agency's present systems are ~~appropriate~~ *adequate* for the situation in which the Agency finds itself at the moment. ~~It is doing what it can with what it can get. It should soon have more to work with as a result of the expansion of the recruiting staff. Improved recruitment in turn will lead to changes in other parts of the system.~~ In summary, there is, and ~~apparently~~ *basically* will be, a deliberate constant search for ways to achieve a more effective system for obtaining and keeping the clerical personnel which the Agency needs.

This situation is under constant review and each suggested improvement for the present and for the future is explored.

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